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Bremmer, Jan

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JAN BREMMER

It was a warm summer evening in 422 BC. Young Autolycus had just gained a victory in the pancratium, the annual 'all in' boxing and wrestling contest, and his uncle, the wealthy Callias, had taken him and his father Lykon to the horse-races. On their way home to his villa in the Piraeus, where they would conclude the day with a banquet, Callias suddenly caught sight of Socrates and a group of friends. He walked over to the philosopher and invited him to the banquet too on the grounds that the evening's entertainment would be even more brilliant if graced by his presence. Socrates accepted, and when all the guests had lain down they were strangely fascinated by the victorious boy's beauty and so influenced by Eros that they grew totally quiet and feasted in silence.

With this intriguing scene Xenophon (*c.*430–350 BC) opens his *Symposion*, which he composed after 380 BC in order to give his own picture of his revered master Socrates, only a few years after Plato's brilliantly evocative *Symposium*.[1] Having thus set the scene, Xenophon applied a well-known literary device by introducing a stranger.[2] After a sudden knock on the door the porter announced the arrival of Philip the *gelotopoios*, literally the 'laughter-producer' (but henceforth, for lack of a better English equivalent, 'buffoon'). Having been permitted to enter, he stood on the threshold and stated: 'you all know that I am a buffoon; and so I have come here on purpose, thinking it more of a joke to come to your dinner uninvited than to come by invitation.' 'Well then', said the host, 'take a place, for the guests though well fed, as you observe, on seriousness, are perhaps rather ill supplied with laughter.' The buffoon immediately attempted a joke and failed miserably. When his second joke was not well received either, he stopped eating, wrapped himself in his cloak, lay down on a couch and started to groan. Only after the other guests promised to laugh next time, and one of them burst out in loud laughter at the buffoon's misery, did he resume his dinner (1.11–16).

When the tables had been removed, a professional entertainer from

Syracuse entered the room with a flute girl, a dancing girl and a beautiful boy, who was expert at playing the cither and at dancing. After the dancing girl had performed various acrobatic tricks, such as juggling twelve hoops and turning somersaults into a hoop with upright swords, Philip the buffoon must have felt that her successful performance challenged his own status as an entertainer. So he got up and, mimicking in detail the dancing of both the boy and the girl, made a burlesque out of their performance 'by rendering every moving part of his body more grotesque than it naturally was'. This, at long last, produced the so much desired laughter (2.22–3). After these light intermezzos, a serious discussion arose in which Philip intervened a few times. During a debate about everybody's most valuable possession he confirmed that his pride lay in jesting (3.11), and, later, he explained the reason for his pride: 'whenever people have a bit of good fortune, [they] give me hearty invitations to come and join them, but when suffering some reverse they run from me with never a glance behind, fearing that they may be forced to laugh in spite of themselves' (4.50).

Finally, towards the end of the evening, one of the guests praised Philip's skill 'at hitting off a person's likeness'. The buffoon jumped at the possibility of demonstrating his art, but Socrates admonished him that he would be a valuable asset to the diners only if he would be 'reticent on matters that should not be talked about', and 'thus was quenched this bit of convivial unpleasantness' (6.8–10).

Xenophon's description of Callias' dinner is a fairly realistic picture of the entertainment enjoyed by the rich and famous in late fifth-century Athens, although he was probably too young to have been present on such occasions. It is also our most extensive description of a 'professional' jester, since other notices do not provide much more than a name or a detail.[3] It raises a number of questions. Was it normal for buffoons to intrude into a banquet – and why there? Who were they and what was their repertory? Did they use jokebooks? Why was Philip not allowed to draw certain comparisons? Was humour perhaps considered dangerous? The last point leads us finally to those who attempted to 'tame' laughter or even opposed witticisms and laughter altogether: conservative philosophers, Spartans and the early Christians.

Buffoons

It is rather striking that Philip's performance did not take place in public space, as is the case with most modern entertainers. On the contrary, he performed during a *symposion*, in the safe surroundings of the most distinctive room in the Greek house, the so-called *andron* (1.13), which was the one room in the house to which male non-family members had

access.[4] It was typical of Greek civilization that the occasions for laughter and mockery were not those of everyday life but those of conviviality and festivity. The great religious festivals, especially, allowed the Greeks to relax the usual standards of behaviour and to indulge in legitimate laughter and ribald humour.[5] As the philosopher Democritus said, 'A life without festivals is like a road without inns' (fragment 230). The great comedies of Aristophanes were never performed on just any odd day in the year but only at the Dionysia (both urban and rural) and Lenaea. Both at the Lenaea and another Dionysiac Athenian festival, the Anthesteria, men stood on waggons and made mocking remarks at passers-by.[6] Another occasion for mocking people was the procession of the Athenians to Eleusis in order to be initiated in the Mysteries of Demeter. When this procession passed the bridge over the River Kephisos on their way out of Athens, a veiled prostitute (or a male) mocked the most prominent citizens by name.[7] Both Dionysos and Demeter were gods closely associated with reversals of the social order and both occupied an 'eccentric' position in the Greek pantheon.[8] Humour could be dangerous, and its place in culture had to be limited to strictly defined occasions.[9] The Greeks were only too well aware that laughter could have a very unpleasant side.[10]

One of these occasions, then, was the *symposion*, the banquet, which in the archaic age (*c.*800–500 BC) had been the stage where the elite demonstrated its superiority. Here the aristocrats discussed politics, made alliances and, last but not least, entertained themselves with dice and games, by telling anecdotes and by singing songs.[11] When, towards the end of the sixth century, politics started to develop into a separate sphere, which was no longer the monopoly of the aristocracy, the symposion gradually lost its central position and became part of a more private personal sphere.[12] Aristocrats now started to show the typical characteristics of a leisure class with its stress on displaying wealth and passive entertainment. It was not, though, until the middle of the fifth century that Athenian aristocrats could afford to invite all kinds of people to their tables.[13] Their guests soon included a particular type, the flatterer (*kolax*), who, evidently, in order 'to pay' for his food flattered his host, whom he called *ho trephon* ('the feeder').[14] As the chorus says in *Flatterers*, a comedy of 421 by Aristophanes' contemporary Eupolis:

> I go out to the market. And when I spy a sucker who is rich, I fasten upon him at once. And if the rich fool happens to say something, I loudly praise him and express my amazement, pretending delight in his words. Then we go to dinner, one of us in one direction, another in another – all to get a barley-cake not our own.[15] There the flatterer must at once begin his witty chatter or be chucked out at the door.[16]

Jokes, then, were the expected contribution of the uninvited,[17] as also appears from the words of another parasite in a comedy by the Sicilian Epicharmus, who lived in the first half of the fifth century: 'Dining with him who desires me (he needs only to ask me), and alike with him who desires me not (and there is no need to ask); at dinner there I am a wit, and cause much laughter and praise my host.'[18] Originally, a *parasitos*, literally 'one who eats at the table of another', had been a religious official of the Attic demes,[19] but towards the middle of the fourth century BC, although for obscure reasons, the term gradually developed into the more modern sense and became synonymous with *kolax*.[20] In the fifth century we also find the term *bomolochos*, literally 'he who lays an ambush at altars', namely to beg food, as a late lexicon explains. The particular place may look strange at first sight, but is to be expected because the Greeks consumed meat mainly through sacrifice.[21] The custom of exchanging food for jokes was probably old because the related verb *bomolocheuo* means 'to play the buffoon' or 'to indulge in ribaldry', but in the course of time successful buffoons had evidently moved from the altars of the pious to the more extragavant dining rooms of the Athenian elite.

Like jokes, parodic imitations such as Philip's burlesquing of the dancing boy and girl were probably the stock-in-trade of buffoons, since we also hear of a different fourth-century *gelotopoios*, Eudikos, who imitated boxers and wrestlers, whereas others imitated dithyrambs and songs to the harp. The tyrant of Syracuse, Agathocles (*c.*300 BC), 'who was by nature a buffoon and a mimic', even made himself highly popular with the people by mimicking some of those present at the meetings of the popular assembly.[22]

In addition to jokes and imitations, the jokers also made comparisons, a popular feature of weddings and symposia.[23] We find these comparisons in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, but they also occur in Plato's *Symposion*, where Alcibiades compares Socrates to 'one of those little sileni that you see on the statuaries' stalls . . . and then again . . . of Marsyas the satyr' (215A). It is not surprising that the comparison is hardly flattering: comparisons seem to have focused especially on physical peculiarities, since in Plato's *Meno* Socrates observes that all good-looking people enjoy a game of comparisons because 'they get the best of it, for naturally handsome folk provoke handsome similes' (80C).[24] Apparently, these comparisons were also collected into books (for use at banquets?). A papyrus of the late third century BC contains an enumeration of abusive sentences, which were divided in various sections and directed against people with physical peculiarities. One of the sections concerned the redhead, who would be made fun of by feeble statements such as 'you do not have a face but an evening-sun', another the bald, who would be mocked by 'you do not have a head but . . .',

at which point the papyrus, perhaps fortunately, breaks off. Most likely, the book was owned by a professional joker, such as we encountered in Xenophon's *Symposion*.[25] But, if these comparisons were completely normal, why then did Socrates object to Philip making them? Was everybody not perhaps happy with humour?

Before we turn to this question, let us first look at the problem of where exactly in the social spectra we should situate these buffoons. From comedy we know the names of various buffoons and parasites, which shows that they were well known in Athens (Athenaeus 240–6). The activity may have run in families because, during the wedding of the Macedonian Karanos, 'the clown Mandrogenes had come in, a descendant, so they say, of the celebrated Athenian clown Straton. He caused many a laugh among us by his jokes, and afterwards danced with his wife, who was over eighty years old' (Athenaeus 130c). Jokers may even have achieved a certain reputation through their wit, since comedy invented a pair of mythological inventors for jesting: Rhadamanthys and Palamedes. The former was one of the best-known residents of the carefree Isles of the Blest, where food was abundant, the latter Greece's most ingenious mythological inventor, witticisms being among his inventions.[26]

In Athens, in the second half of the fourth century, there even existed a club of buffoons, called 'the sixty', who regularly met in the sanctuary of Heracles in Diomeia, one of Athens' suburbs.[27] They were so well known that sayings circulated, such as 'I have just come from the sixty' and 'The sixty said so-and-so'. These jokers must even have been famous outside Athens, since Philip II of Macedonia, who was fond of all kinds of entertainment, sent them a talent in return for their jokes. The members of the 'club' were evidently amateurs not professionals, since their names show them to have belonged to the Athenian upper class; one of them, the cross-eyed Callimedon, was even a renowned politician.[28] Considering that buffoonery seems to have become less and less acceptable in the fourth century, the club may well point to a group of citizens wanting to shock the existing social order.[29]

Outside Athens buffoons were welcome guests at the courts of the neighbouring kings of Thrace and Macedonia and the successors of Alexander the Great.[30] Yet it seems that among the urban elite clowning strongly diminished in status. An indication may be the end of Dionysius the Second, tyrant of Syracuse. The contemporary historian Theopompus (*c.*377–320) relates that he was gradually losing the sight of his eyes. For a while his parasites behaved as if they also suffered from bad eye-sight, and they would feel for the food put in front of them, pretending not to see it, until Dionysius guided their hands towards the dishes – a behaviour which earnt them the nickname 'Dionysius-fawners' (*Dionysokolakes*). It is hardly strange that Dionysius eventually lost his

position and ended up, as Theopompus states, not necessarily reliably, 'sitting in barbershops and playing the buffoon.'[31] The barbershop was of course the place of male gossip *par excellence*, not least by the barber himself – witness the request of his client, when asked how to be shaved: 'in silence'.[32] In other words, Dionysius fell from the height of society to its very bottom. This negative view of buffoonery accelerated in the course of time, and in the Roman period buffoons were often closely associated with performers in mimes and, therefore, pretty low on the social scale.[33] According to the second-century *Dreambook* of Artemidorus, dreaming of buffoons now meant 'cheating and trickeries' (1.76).

Jokers and their Books

It is clear that Philip's skills only partially approached those of modern entertainers. Cracking jokes and impersonating are the hallmark of many a modern comedian, but Philip also did comparisons, an art which is not typical of modern entertainment. Unfortunately, Xenophon does not supply any examples of the jokes, and neither do other authors. We do not know, therefore, either the nature of these jokes or their origin. Did buffoons also make use of jokebooks? One of our sources for 'the sixty' says that Philip asked for the jokes to be copied out, which would suggest a kind of jokebook, but another source mentions that he merely asked for them to be written down. We cannot be absolutely certain, then, about the existence of jokebooks in the later half of the fourth century, but they are attested in the Roman comedian Plautus, who used Greek comedy as his source. In his *Stichus*, produced in 200 BC, the parasite Gelasimus (significantly a Greek name meaning 'Laughter man' and suggestive of the *gelotopoios*) is reduced to such straits that he intends to hold an auction and sell his jokebooks, which consist of jests, flattering remarks and small-scale lies.[34] And in Plautus' *Persa* the joker Satyrio considers giving his jokebooks to his daughter for her dowry (vv. 389–96). It is clear, then, that these jokers possessed jokebooks to help them make a living, whereas some early modern diners, such as Aernout van Overbeke, collected jokes in notebooks to be a social success among their peers.[35] Like Xenophon, Plautus gives no example of these jokes, but we are lucky that in late antiquity an anonymous author composed a jokebook that has survived.

A series of manuscripts, none older than the tenth century, called *Philogelos*, or 'Laughter-lover', contains a collection of 265 jokes.[36] Its author and purpose are, unfortunately, unknown, and only one joke refers to an event that can be dated, namely the games celebrating Rome's millennium on 21 April 248 AD. The collection was probably

put together in the third century, but the late nature of its vocabulary strongly suggests that the final edition was made only in early Byzantine times, probably not later than the sixth century.[37] One source was clearly Plutarch's collection of *apophthegmata*, which here regularly appear in 'diluted' form as a joke.[38] Obviously, space prevents us from analysing its content in depth, but we will briefly discuss some of its main targets.[39]

From the 265 jokes, 110 concern the *scholastikos*, literally 'somebody who gives or follows lectures' (*scholas*).[40] It is the pedantic student, the lawyer, but also the professor – in short, in Barry Baldwin's happy translation, 'the egghead'. The jokes may suggest a certain wittiness as in no. 55: 'A witty young *scholastikos* sold his books when short of money. He then wrote to his father, "Congratulate me, father, I am already making money from my studies!" ' But mostly they focus on his stupidity or social ineptness, as in the following example, which at the same time illustrates the gruesome realities of ancient slave-society:[41] 'When a *scholastikos* had a child by a slave girl, his father advised him to kill it. But he replied, "First, you bury your own children, then advise me to kill mine!" ' (no. 57).

Some sixty jokes concern cities in the ancient world which were famous for their stupidity: Cyme (on the western coast of modern Turkey), Sidon (in modern Lebanon) and Abdera (on the coast of Thrace). These jokes rarely rise above the normal level of jokes celebrating the stupidity of neighbouring cities: 'An inhabitant of Cyme brought his father's body to the mummifiers after the latter's death in Alexandria. When he returned later to fetch it, the man had several bodies present and asked him the mark of his father's case. He answered: "He coughed" ' (no. 171). The reason why the first two cities figured in these jokes is totally obscure, but Abdera was well known for its 'laughing philosopher' Democritus, who seems to have received his name for laughing at the stupidity of his fellow citizens, and who became a popular figure in philosophical and moralizing treatises from late Hellenistic and Roman times.[42]

In some thirty jokes doctors are the object or play a supporting role. Some of these jokes even combined the reference to doctors with the already mentioned *scholastikoi* or cities famous for their stupidity: 'When somebody came to a *scholastikos* doctor and said: "Doctor, when I wake up I am dizzy for half an hour before I start feeling better," the doctor said: "Wake up half an hour later!" ' (no. 3). 'When his patient suffered and cried loudly, a doctor from Cyme exchanged his knife for a more blunt one' (no. 177). It is hardly surprising that in a time in which medical care was still highly undeveloped, individual doctors or the medical profession as a whole were the butt of lay derision. In addition to the fact that doctors were intellectuals, it was probably also

significant that they frequently advertised their skills and even undertook surgery on street corners or in the theatre.[43]

There are some seven jokes regarding seers and astrologers. Seers had already been a favourite target of ancient comedy, and Roman satirists had made fun of astrologers and fortune-tellers, but both categories managed to maintain their influence through the whole of antiquity, despite the scepticism which these jokes attest.[44] Finally, there are small sections of jokes about the lazy, the greedy, cowards, gluttons, alcoholics, people with bad breath and misogynists. Given that misogyny was widespread in antiquity, it is striking that so few jokes are obscene or concern women. Still, they are not totally absent: 'Said a young man to his randy wife, "Wife, what shall we do, eat or make love?" "Whichever you like; there's no bread" ' (no. 244). Or, 'The wife of a misogynist, who was so ill that he was expected to die, swore that she would hang herself if anything happened to him. Perking up, he asked, "Will you do the same if I recover?" ' (no. 248).

The prominence of eggheads and doctors in the collection probably points to a specific social milieu. In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Socrates enumerates his guardian gods: sophists, who were in fact quacks, seers, poets and jugglers (vv. 332–3). In other words, these were mainly the intellectuals of his time, who were not engaged in any kind of manual work. The same prejudice seems to be in operation here, and it would fit this disdain for intellectuals that many jokes celebrate the common sense of the man in the street. Consequently, the origin of the collection is probably the lower urban classes, even though it remains obscure for what reason this jokebook had been composed.

The Taming of Buffoonery and Laughter

The objections of Socrates could have fitted the fictional time of Xenophon's *Symposion*, since a late anthology ascribed the following quotation to Socrates: 'One ought to use laughter as one uses salt – sparingly' (Stobaeus 3.34.18). If the ascription is correct, Socrates would have been one of various philosophers who were reputed never or only rarely to have laughed, such as Pythagoras, Anaxagoras and the wise king Anacharsis.[45] On the other hand, around 420 there was still a robust sense of humour prevailing in Athens, and the absence of laughter was thought to be characteristic of a misanthrope,[46] even though Aristophanes regularly, if disingenuously, claimed that he did not use the coarse comic tricks normally employed by Old Comedy;[47] in his last comedies, however, he employed less and less personal invective and buffoonery.[48] Evidently the tide had turned, and the more refined manners which were gradually developing among Athenian

aristocrats must have started to make personal attacks and less refined humour gradually unacceptable.

The first element of this development is also visible in Xenophon's treatise on the education of the Persian king Cyrus, the *Cyropaedia*, which often indirectly discusses Greek customs and probably has to be dated to the first half of the fourth century. Here Cyrus remarks that the Persians ask each other only those questions which could be easily answered and made only those jokes which did not hurt anybody (5.2.18). We are here confronted with the negative power of jokes, which can hurt us and, by implication, still more those who live in a real shame culture. This power of jokes can still be observed in contemporary Crete. Michael Herzfeld, the best contemporary ethnographer of Greece, recently noted an incident in which Cretan villagers would ask permission to recite satiric songs in order not to be blamed for offending anybody's dignity.[49] This concern with the power of jokes to hurt seems to have become more pronounced in the course of the fourth century.

The growing unacceptability of less refined humour becomes clearly apparent in various works of Isocrates in the 350s. In his *Antidosis* this conservative orator, who frequently idealized the past, disapprovingly notes that nowadays 'they speak of men who play the buffoon and have a talent for mocking and mimicking as "gifted" – an appellation which should be reserved for men endowed with the highest excellence' (284, trans. G. Norlin). And in his *Areopagiticus* he notes that previous generations 'cultivated the manner of a gentleman, not those of a buffoon; and as for those who had a turn for jesting (*eutrapelous*) and playing the clown, who we today speak of as clever wits, they were then looked upon as sorry fools' (49, trans. Norlin).

In fact, both Plato and Aristotle, the major philosophers of the fourth century, opposed coarse humour and ribaldry and stressed the need for restrained, inoffensive laughter. In the *Republic* Plato states that the guardians of the ideal state are forbidden to indulge in laughter because excessive laughter is usually followed by a violent reaction (388). This stress on moderation in laughter also comes to the fore somewhat later in the *Republic* in the discussion of poetry (606). Here Plato rejects buffoonery in comedy because it may make people imitate it in private. And in the *Laws*, admittedly a very conservative work, Plato even wants to abolish comedy altogether and leave buffoonery to slaves or hired aliens (816–17). It fits with Plato's opposition to laughter that in his school, the Academy, laughter was forbidden, and he himself was represented in Athenian comedy as a grouch.[50]

Unlike wealthy Callias and his friends, Plato also completely rejected the presence of hired entertainment at the symposion:

> the wine-parties of second-rate and commonplace people. Such men, being too uneducated to entertain themselves as they drink by using their own voices and conversational resources, put up the price of female musicians . . . and find their entertainment in its warblings. But where the drinkers are men of worth and culture, you will find no girls piping or dancing or harping. They are quite capable of enjoying their own company without such frivolous nonsense, using their own voices in sober discussion and each taking his turn to speak or listen – even if the drinking is really heavy.
>
> (*Protagoras* 347CD, trans. W. K. C. Guthrie)

It fits with Plato's description that the host in Xenophon's *Symposion*, Callias, was not particularly ascetic and managed to squander his considerable inheritance quickly by his extragavant life style.[51]

Aristotle's *On Comedy* has unfortunately not survived,[52] but he presents a systematic analysis of jests and laughter in his *Nicomachean Ethics* (4.8). In Aristotle we can see the tendency in Plato fully elaborated, since he considers as vulgar buffoons those who carry humour to excess and aim at raising a laugh rather than saying something flattering and avoiding hurting the object of their fun. Those, on the other hand, who joke in a tasteful way are called ready-witted (*eutrapeloi*). They are the men who observe the mean, whereas the buffoon is the slave of his sense of humour, and spares neither himself nor others if he can raise a laugh. Naturally, in his ideal state the young should not be exposed to indecent talk – the law-giver should even banish it from the state altogether (*Politics* 7.15.7). Aristotle summarizes his views in the *Rhetoric* as follows: 'Some jokes are becoming to a gentleman, others are not; see that you choose such as become you. Irony better befits a gentleman than buffoonery; the ironical man jokes to amuse himself, the buffoon to amuse other people' (3.18).[53]

In the fourth century, then, two developments regarding humour at the symposion are noticeable. First, buffoonery became less and less acceptable to the upper class as an expression of humour. Secondly, as the reaction of Socrates showed, insulting others with jokes also became less acceptable at the symposion, although quarrels and verbal offences had always been an integral part of the sympotic tradition; like early Ireland, early Greece had a lively tradition of blame poetry.[54] These developments were also reflected in performances of comedy where the element of buffoonery diminished and personal insults disappeared from the comic repertory.

How can this development, which has more often been observed regarding comedy than for the symposion be explained? Clearly,

important changes were taking place in Athenian society in these days. The fourth century showed all the traces of a growing 'embourgeoisement' with the corresponding refinement of morals: telling jokes made way for wittiness. It is significant that the noun 'wittiness' (*eutrapelia*) is not found before Plato's *Republic* but is often discussed in Aristotle; *eutrapelos* ('witty') now also started to lose the negative connotation which, for example, it still had in the passage of Isocrates quoted above.[55] At the same time, perspectives developed by Norbert Elias and Pierre Bourdieu may perhaps be applied here. As the aristocracy started to withdraw from public life and to concentrate more on the symposion, disagreements and internal quarrels became less acceptable. Moreover, as they had little to gain by being active in public life, they had to distinguish themselves in different ways. And just as they started to move in a more controlled manner, so they also developed a more urbane style in their sympotic behaviour.[56]

Opposing Humour and Laughter

We need not assume that the growing refinement in Greek culture actually became the rule. The fact that four centuries later Plutarch (*c.*40–120) still thought it necessary to repeat the plea for the painless jest (*Moralia* 629E) suggests that the habit of insulting was deeply rooted in the world of the ancient symposion. However, others went further and opposed humour and laughter altogether.

The first group known to have opposed laughter were the Pythagoreans. Around 530 BC Pythagoras left the island of Samos and settled in South-Italian Croton, where he founded a movement based on numerous ascetic prescriptions. Although the figure of Pythagoras is surrounded with legends and the lack of early written sources makes it very difficult to reconstruct this phase of Pythagoreanism, one of these prescriptions evidently concerned laughter: the master himself reputedly never laughed, as was reported of the Pythagorizing tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius II, and the fullest source for ancient Pythagoreanism, the fourth-century philosopher Aristoxenus; Pythagoras' followers were mocked by Athenian comedy for their joyless facial expressions.[57]

Considering that we have identified the symposion and the festivals of Dionysos as the scenes for humour, it is worth observing that in Plato's *Laws* the Spartan remarks that his state has forbidden festive indulgence at these occasions (637B). Xenophon, too, mentions in his booklet on the Spartan constitution that their symposia lacked hybris, drunkenness and foul language (5.6), and Plutarch stresses that the young could attend the Spartan messes in order to get accustomed to

mocking without buffoonery and to endure being mocked. However, when a Spartan could no longer tolerate being mocked, he could ask the mocker to stop, which he immediately did, according to Plutarch in his idealizing biography of Lycurgus (12.6–7). The strong pressures on Spartan life to close ranks in the face of the threat of the subject population, the Helots, had probably made festivity and mockery intolerable.[58]

But some went even further. In the New Testament Epistle to the Ephesians, the author (probably not St Paul) states that *eutrapelia*, 'wit', had no place in the Christian community (5.4). It has been suggested that *eutrapelia* here means something like 'suggestive language',[59] but wit is condemned by somewhat later Christian authors such as Ignatius, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and, in literally dozens of passages, Basil and John Chrysostom. The last two even went so far as to condemn laughter too, which in fact many Church Fathers did.[60] Clement of Alexandria (*c.*150–215), who wrote a book, the *Paedagogus*, in order to instruct upper-class Christian youths, dedicated a special section to the problem of laughter. He wished to banish buffoons from Christian society,[61] but he did not aim at abolishing laughter altogether. It would be unnatural to suppress laughter, according to Clement, but the Christian had to display moderation, as in all things. A smile should be sufficient for the Christian, whereas women and young men should be very careful not to laugh; a similar rule was laid down by Basil of Caesarea (*c.*330–79) in one of the first monastic *Rules*, the so-called *Regulae fusius tractatae*. In this respect, as in several others, these Church Fathers followed the tradition of the more conservative philosophers. Their Christian life style was in many ways still a pagan one.[62]

Enjoying humour and boisterous laughter is eminently opposed to striving to keep all of life under control, which can be observed among the Pythagoreans, the Spartans and, to a much more marked degree, the ascetic Christians. It should be no surprise that a social group which attempted to keep in check all sorts of physical expression, such as eating, sleeping and sexuality, also objected to laughter. To enjoy humour and laughter freely is the mark of a relaxed, open community, not of an ascetic ideology or tense society.

It must have been the similarities between Pythagoreans, Spartans and Christians which led to a mutual influence in late antiquity. According to the pagan philosopher Iamblichus in his *On the Pythagorean Way of Life* (25), Pythagoras had visited Sparta in order to study its laws, and the passage in Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (14), in which he observed that the saint never laughed or grieved, was taken almost word-for-word from the pagan Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* (25). In fact, both in practices and hagiography Pythagoreans and early Chris-

tians were much more interrelated than they themselves would have liked to admit.[63] Regarding laughter, this combined heritage would prove to have a long tradition in the Western Church – witness the prohibitions and restrictions of laughter in the medieval monastic *Rules*.[64] Moreover, in addition to this heritage from late antiquity, Thomas Aquinas would again take up the ideas of Aristotle on *eutrapelia* and interpret them as a plea for restrained laughter, a plea which was followed by Pascal.[65] And so the echo of ancient laughter would be audible – albeit moderately for many centuries.

Notes

I am most grateful to André Lardinois for comments and to Robert Parker for his skilful correction of my English.

1 For a full study of Xenophon's dialogue see G. J. Woldinga, *Xenophons Symposium* (Diss., University of Amsterdam, 1938). In my quotations and summary I have used the translation by O. J. Todd in the Loeb *Xenophon*, vol. 4 (Cambridge and London, 1923).

2 The same device occurs in Plato, *Symposium* 174A, cf. Woldinga, *Xenophons Symposium*, p. 141.

3 For a good survey of the ancient buffoons, see P. Maas, '*Gelotopoioi*', in *Pauly's Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart, 1912), pp. 1019–21.

4 Cf. M. Jameson, 'Private space and the Greek city', in O. Murray and S. Price (eds), *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 170–95; idem, 'Domestic space in the Greek City-state', in S. Kent (ed.), *Domestic Architecture and the Use of Space* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 92–113.

5 For a good survey of ancient festivities, see C. Calame, 'La festa', in M. Vegetti (ed.), *Introduzione alle culture antiche*, vol. 3 (Turin, 1992), pp. 29–54.

6 W. Burkert, *Homo necans* (Berkeley, 1983), p. 229.

7 F. Graf, *Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin and New York, 1974), pp. 45–6; Burkert, *Homo necans*, p. 278; A. M. Bowie, *Aristophanic Comedy* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 239–40.

8 J. Bremmer, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 18–20.

9 This is rightly stressed by S. Halliwell, 'The uses of laughter in Greek culture', *Classical Quarterly*, 41 (1991), pp. 279–96.

10 D. Lateiner, 'No laughing matter: a literary tactic in Herodotus', *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 107 (1977), pp. 173–82. For laughter in Greek culture the best study remains L. Woodbury, *Quo modo risu ridiculoque Graeci usi sint* (Diss., Harvard University, 1944); see also S. Milanezi, 'Le rire d'Hadès', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, 21 (1995), pp. 231–45.

11 On the *symposion*, see most recently O. Murray (ed.), *Sympotica* (Oxford, 1990); K. Vierneisel and B. Kaeser (eds), *Kunst der Schale – Kultur des*

Trinkens (Munich, 1990); W. J. Slater (ed.), *Dining in a Classical Context* (Ann Arbor, 1991).

12 E. Stein-Hölkeskamp, 'Lebensstil als Selbstdarstellung: Aristokraten beim Symposium', in *Euphronios und seine Zeit* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 39–48; B. Seidensticker, 'Dichtung und Gesellschaft im 4. Jahrhundert. Versuch eines Überblicks', in W. Eder (ed.), *Die athenische Demokratie im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Stuttgart, 1995), pp. 175–98.

13 E. Pellizer, 'Outlines of a morphology of sympotic entertainment', in Murray, *Sympotica*, pp. 177–84.

14 Timocles, fr. 8.8; R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae comici Graeci* (Berlin and New York, 1983–), from which excellent edition I quote all the fragments of ancient Greek comedy; Macho *apud* Athenaeus 579b; Nicocles *apud* Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 14.7; Alciphron 3.66.5.

15 Kassel and Austin, *Poetae comici Graeci*, in their commentary ad loc., do not observe that this is a (minor) joke because barley was the cheapest form of bread, cf. Bremmer, 'Marginalia Manichaica', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 39 (1980), pp. 29–34, esp. p. 32; T. Braun, 'Barley cakes and emmer bread', in J. Wilkins et al. (eds), *Food in Antiquity* (Exeter, 1995), pp. 25–37.

16 Eupolis, fr. 172, trans. C. B. Gulick, Loeb (slightly adapted).

17 To arrive uninvited was characteristic of the ancient parasites, cf. Asius, fr. 14 West; Cratinus, fr. 46, 47 and 182; Alexis, fr. 213, 259; Timotheus, fr. 1; Apollodorus Carystius, fr. 29 and 31; Lynkeus of Samos in Athenaeus 245a; Lucian, *Demonax* 63; B. Fehr, 'Entertainers at the *Symposion*: the *Akletoi* in the archaic period', in Murray, *Sympotica*, pp. 185–95.

18 Epicharmus, fr. 35 Kaibel, trans. C. B Gulick, Loeb; note for funny parasites also Alexis fr. 188, 229; Philemon fr. 153; H. Nesselrath, *Lukians Parasitendialog* (Berlin and New York, 1985), p. 19.

19 M. Jameson, '*Theoxenia*', in R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence* (Stockholm, 1994), pp. 35–57, esp. pp. 48f; L. Bruit Zaidman, 'Ritual eating in archaic Greece: parasites and *paredroi*', in Wilkins, *Food in Antiquity*, pp. 196–203.

20 For the relation between these two terms, see Nesselrath, *Lukians Parasitendialog*, pp. 88–121; idem, *Die attische mittlere Komödie* (Berlin and New York, 1990), pp. 309–13; P. G. Brown, 'Menander, fragments 745 and 746K-T, Menander's *Kolax*, and parasites and flatterers in Greek comedy', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 92 (1992), pp. 91–107.

21 Pherecrates, fr. 150; Aristophanes, fr. 171; F. Frontisi-Ducroux, 'La bomolochia: autour de l'embuscade à l'autel', *Cahiers du Centre Jean Berard*, 9 (Naples, 1984), pp. 29–49; Nesselrath, *Die attische mittlere Komödie*, pp. 125–8; K. Dover, *Aristophanes: Frogs* (Oxford, 1993), p. 240. Explanation: Harpocration s.v. *bomolocheuesthai*.

22 Eudikos: Aristoxenus, fr. 135 Wehrli (= Athenaeus 19f). Agathocles: Diodorus Siculus 20.63.2.

23 For weddings see R. Hague, 'Ancient Greek wedding songs: the tradition of praise', *Journal of Folklore Research*, 20 (1983), pp. 131–43.

24 E. Romagnoli, *Studi Italiani di filologia classica*, 13 (1905), pp. 226, 251;

E. Fraenkel, *Elementi Plautini in Plauto* (Florence, 1960), pp. 163–4 and Addenda, p. 422; N. Dunbar, *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 487f.

25 *P. Heidelberg* 190, cf. R. Kassel, *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin and New York, 1991), pp. 418–21 (= *Rheinisches Museum* 99, 1956, pp. 242–5).

26 Eupolis, fr. 385; Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1451; Anaxandrides fr. 10; A. Brelich, *Gli eroi greci* (Rome, 1958), pp. 167–9.

27 This sanctuary is often, although probably wrongly, identified with that of Heracles in Kynosarges, another Athenian suburb, where Cynics and bastards used to meet, cf. R. Parker, *Athenian History: a history* (Oxford, 1996), p. 306.

28 'Sixty': Athenaeus 260b (from Hegesander), 614d–e (also names, from Telephanes). Cross-eyed Callimedon: Timocles, fr. 29, cf. J. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford, 1971), p. 279.

29 For similar 'anti-establishment' clubs, see Murray, *Sympotica*, p. 157.

30 Thrace: Xenophon, *Anabasis* 7.3.33 (King Seuthes). Macedonia: Demosthenes 2.19; Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 162, 236 (Philip II); Plutarch, *Moralia* 60B (Alexander the Great); Athenaeus 130 (the clown Mandrogenes). Successors: Athenaeus 195f (Antiochus Epiphanes danced naked with clowns), 244–5 (Ptolemy), 246 (Lysimachus); Josephus, *Antiquitates* 12.211–14 (Ptolemy).

31 Theopompus *FGrH* 115 F 283b; note also Theophrastus, fr. 548 Fortenbaugh.

32 *Philogelos*, no. 148 (the joke is a 'diluted' version of an *apophthegma* ascribed to the Macedonian king Archelaos [Plutarch, *Moralia* 177A]), cf. Aristophanes, *Birds* 1440ff, *Wealth* 338; Eupolis, fr. 194; Lysias 23.3, 24.20; Demosthenes 25.52; Menander, *Samia* 510–13; Theophrastus, *Characters* 8; Polybius 3.20.5; Philodemus, *De ira* col. 21.23ff; Plutarch, *Nicias* 30, *Moralia* 509A; S. Lewis, 'Barbers' shops and perfume shops: "symposia without wine" ', in A. Powell (ed.), *The Greek World* (London, 1995), pp. 432–41.

33 Cf. Diodorus Siculus 20.63.2; Plutarch, *Antonius* 9.5, *Sulla* 2; Dio Chrysostomus 32.86; Athenaeus 261c, 464f; Cassius Dio 80.4; E. Rawson, 'The vulgarity of the Roman mime', in H. D. Jocelyn (ed.), *Tria Lustra* (Liverpool, 1993), pp. 255–60.

34 Plautus, *Stichus* 221: *logos ridiculos vendo . . . cavillationes, adsentatiunculas ac perieratiunculas parasiticas*; 400 *ibo intro ad libros et discam de dictis melioribus*; 454. For the name of Gelasimus, see Fraenkel, *Elementi Plautini*, 33. Plautine parasites: J. C. B. Lowe, 'Plautus' parasites and the Atellena', in G. Vogt-Spira (ed.), *Studien zur vorliterarischen Periode im frühen Rom* (Tübingen, 1989), pp. 161–9.

35 See Herman Roodenburg, Chapter 8 of this volume.

36 For an excellent edition with translation and commentary, see A. Thierfelder, *Philogelos: der Lachfreund* (Munich, 1968). For an English translation, see B. Baldwin, *The Philogelos or Laughter-lover* (Amsterdam, 1983); for the tradition of the text, see also his 'John Tzetzes and the *Philogelos*', *Byzantion*, 56 (1986), pp. 339–41.

37 Cf. G. Ritter, *Studien zur Sprache des Philogelos* (Diss., University of Basel,

1955); L. Robert, *Entretiens Hardt*, 14 (Geneva, 1968), p. 284.

38 W. Gemoll, *Das Apophthegma* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1924), p. 1, observes that the etymology of *apophthegma* is obscure, but the relation with *phthengomai*, 'to speak loudly', defines the word as a more marked speech-act than just a 'normal' answer. For the appearance of the word in the fourth century, see A. Lardinois, *Wisdom in Context: the use of gnomic statements in archaic Greek poetry* (Diss., Princeton University, 1995), pp. 18–19.

39 The jokes have received virtually no attention in recent times, but see J. Rougé, 'Le *Philogélos* et la navigation', *Journal des savants* (1987), pp. 3–12.

40 For the *scholastikos*, see A. Claus, *Ho scholastikos* (Diss., University of Cologne, 1965); add especially C. Roueché, *Aphrodisias in Late Antiquity* (London, 1989), nos. 42–3, 45, 68–9; R. Kotansky, 'Magic in the court of the governor of Arabia', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 88 (1991), pp. 41–60, esp. pp. 52–3; T. Hickey, 'A fragment of a letter from a bishop to a *scholastikos*', ibid., 110 (1996), pp. 127–31.

41 See the nuanced discussion by M. I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York, 1980), pp. 93–122.

42 T. Rütten, *Demokrit, lachender Philosoph und sanguinischer Melancholiker* (Leiden, 1992), whose remarks on the sources have to be supplemented with K. Brodersen, 'Hippokrates und Artaxerxes. Zu P. Oxy. 1184^{v}, P. Beroli. Inv. 7094^{v} und 21137^{v}+6934^{v}', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, 102 (1994), pp. 100–10; R. Müller, 'Demokrit – der "lachende Philosoph"', in S. Jäkel and A. Timonen (eds), *Laughter down the Centuries*, I (Turku, 1994), pp. 39–51.

43 V. Nutton, 'The medical meeting place', in P. J. van der Eijk et al. (eds), *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context* (2 vols, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1995), I, pp. 3–22, esp. p. 18. It is typical for the status of jokes that they are not mentioned in these excellent volumes.

44 R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order* (New Haven and London, 1966), pp. 128–62; J. Bremmer, 'Prophets, seers, and politics in Greece, Israel and early modern Europe', *Numen*, 40 (1993), pp. 150–83.

45 Pythagoras: Diogenes Laertius 8.20. Anaxagoras: Aelian, *Varia historia* 8.13. Anacharsis: Athenaeus 613d.

46 Phrynichus, fr. 19.

47 Aristophanes, *Peace* 740–50. Aristophanes regularly rejects comic tricks of his competitors, which later he unashamedly uses himself, cf. A. H. Sommerstein, *Aristophanes: Peace* (Warminster, 1985), p. 167; E. Degani and J. M. Bremer, in J. M. Bremer and E. W. Handley (eds), *Aristophane* = *Entretiens Hardt*, 38 (Geneva, 1993), p. 168.

48 Degani, in ibid., pp. 8f.

49 M. Herzfeld, *The Poetics of Manhood* (Princeton, 1985), pp. 146–9.

50 On Plato, the symposium and laughter, see H. D. Rankin, 'Laughter, humor and related topics in Plato', *Classica et Medievalia*, 27 (1966), pp. 186–213; M. Mader, *Das Problem des Lachens und der Komödie bei Platon* (Stuttgart, 1977); G. J. de Vries, 'Laughter in Plato', *Mnemosyne*, IV, 38 (1985), pp. 378–81; M. Tecusan, '*Logos Sympotikos*: patterns of the

irrational in philosophical drinking: Plato outside the *Symposium*', in Murray, *Sympotica*, pp. 238–60; Z. Stewart, 'Laughter and the Greek philosophers: a sketch', in Jäkel and Timonen, *Laughter down the Centuries*, pp. 29–36. Academy: Aelian, *Varia historia* 3.35. Grouch: Amphis, fr. 12.

51 Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families*, pp. 261f.

52 For a good introduction to the present state of our knowledge, see R. Janko, *Aristotle. Poetics* (Indianapolis and Cambridge, 1987).

53 For Aristotle, his school, and humour see A. D. Leeman et al., *M. Tullius Cicero, de oratore libri III: Kommentar* (3 vols, Heidelberg, 1989), III, pp. 190–200; H. Flashar, 'Aristoteles, das Lachen und die alte Komödie', in Jäkel and Timonen, *Laughter down the Centuries*, pp. 59–70.

54 Alexis, fr. 160 with the commentary of Kassel and Austin; W. J. Slater, 'Sympotic ethics in the *Odyssey*', in Murray, *Sympotica*, pp. 213–20; G. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore and London, 1979), pp. 222–75 (blame poetry); P. O'Leary, 'Jeers and judgments: laughter in early Irish literature', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 22 (1991), pp. 15–29.

55 Cf. P. W. van der Horst, 'Is wittiness unchristian? A note on *eutrapelia* in Eph. V 4', in idem. and G. Mussies, *Studies on the Hellenistic Background of the New Testament* (Utrecht, 1990), pp. 223–37.

56 For this development see J. Bremmer, 'Walking, standing, and sitting in ancient Greek culture', in J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg (eds), *A Cultural History of Gesture* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 16–35, esp. pp. 18–20.

57 Aelian, *Varia historia* 8.13 (Aristoxenos), 13.18 (Dionysius); Alexis, fr. 201 (comedy). For Pythagoras, see the brilliant study of W. Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism* (Cambridge, MA, 1972); J. Bremmer, 'Religious secrets and secrecy in classical Greece', in H. Kippenberg and G. Stroumsa (eds), *Secrecy and Concealment* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 61–78, esp. pp. 63–70 (some additions).

58 E. David, 'Laughter in Spartan society', in A. Powell (ed.), *Classical Sparta: techniques behind her success* (London, 1989), pp. 1–25; N. Fisher, 'Drink, *hybris*, and the promotion of harmony in Sparta', ibid., pp. 26–50.

59 Van der Horst, 'Is wittiness unchristian?', who also discusses the problematic attitude of Christians towards humour; add now H. Rahner, 'Eutrapélie', in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique*, vol. 4.2 (Paris, 1961), pp. 1726–9; C. Spicq, *Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire: supplément* (Fribourg and Göttingen, 1982), pp. 322–5; G. Luck, 'Humor', *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, 16 (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 753–73 (not quite satisfactory).

60 Wittiness: Ignatius, *Epistle* 4.8; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.6.50, 2.7.53; Origen, *Fragmenta ex commentariis in epistulam ad Ephesios* 24 (= *Journal of Theological Studies*, 3, 1902, 559); Basil, *Epistles* 2, 22.1; John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca* 49.235; 58.516; 60.72; 62.120 and *passim*. Laughter: N. Adkin, 'The Fathers on laughter', *Orpheus*, 6 (1985), pp. 149–52; add the probably spurious treatise of John Chrysostom, *Ascetam facetiis uti non debere* (*Patrologia Graeca* 48.1053–60).

61 This opposition to buffoons recurs regularly among the Church Fathers. See, for example, Asterius, *Homilies* 1.5.4 (who still combines buffoons

and parasites); Gregory of Nyssa, *De beneficentia* 9.105; John Chrysostom, *Patrologia Graeca* 58.665; 60.75; 62.120.

62 Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 2.5.45–8; Basil, *Patrologia Graeca* 31.961.

63 Cf. J. Bremmer, 'Symbols of marginality from early Pythagoreans to late antique monks', *Greece and Rome*, 39 (1992), pp. 205–14, esp. pp. 205–6; M. van Uytfanghe, 'L'Hagiographie: un "genre" chrétien ou antique tardif?', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 111 (1993), pp. 135–88.

64 B. Steidle, 'Das Lachen im alten Mönchtum', *Benediktinische Monatschrift zur Pflege religiösen und geistigen Lebens*, 20 (1938), pp. 271–80, reprinted in his *Beiträge zum alten Mönchtum und zur Benediktusregel* (Sigmaringen, 1986), pp. 30–9; G. Schmitz, '. . . quod rident homines, plorandum est. Der "Unwert" des Lachens in monastisch geprägten Vorstellungen der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters', in F. Quarthal and W. Setzler (eds), *Stadtverfassung – Verfassungsstaat – Pressepolitik* (Sigmaringen, 1980), pp. 3–15; J. Le Goff, 'Le Rire dans les règles monastiques du haut moyen âge', in C. Lepelley et al. (eds), *Haut moyen-âge: culture, éducation et société. Études offertes à Pierre Riché* (La Garenne-Colombes, 1990), pp. 93–103; Le Goff, Chapter 3 of this volume.

65 H. Rahner, 'Eutrapelie, eine vergessene Tugend', *Geist und Leben*, 27 (1954), pp. 346–53; M.-M. Dufeil, 'Risus in theologia Thome', in T. Bouché and H. Charpentier (eds), *Le Rire au Moyen Âge dans la littérature et les arts* (Bordeaux, 1990), pp. 147–63; J. Morel, 'Pascal et la doctrine du rire grave', in *Méthodes chez Pascal* (Paris, 1979), pp. 213–22; J. Morreall, 'The rejection of humor in Western thought', *Philosophy East and West*, 39 (1989), pp. 243–65; Verberckmoes, Chapter 6 of this volume.